

Balancing Environmental Protection and Economic Development: What Do North Carolinians Want?

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The latter part of the 1980s saw a revival of concern about environmental issues. These issues began to occupy more of policy makers' time and attention at both the national and local levels. Little has been done to evaluate public opinion about the difficult choices between the environment and growth and development, however.

In October 1989, MarketSearch Corporation of Columbia, S.C., conducted a telephone survey of 1500 residents of North and South Carolina, 750 from each state, on economic development and the environment. The purpose of the study was to evaluate public opinions and attitudes about these two important areas and how people in the two Carolinas feel about them. This report focuses on the viewpoints of North Carolinians by highlighting some of the study's key findings.

Support for economic growth and development is strong in North Carolina. In fact, almost three-fourths (73.5%) of its residents surveyed feel their communities should be doing more to attract new business and industry to the state. This support for growth remains strong even when the environment is taken into account.

"Despite some of the environmental problems caused by growth, North Carolina should continue to encourage growth and development for the benefits it brings to the people in an area."

<i>Disagree Strongly</i>	<i>Disagree Moderately</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>Agree Moderately</i>	<i>Agree Strongly</i>
6%	8%	4%	39%	43%

Strong support for growth and development, however, does not mean a lack of concern for the environment. North Carolinian's support for preserving the environment is at least as strong as their support for growth. Four-fifths, for example, agree that the environment must be protected, regardless of cost.

"Protecting the environment is so important that standards cannot be too high and improvements must be made, regardless of cost."

<i>Disagree Strongly</i>	<i>Disagree Moderately</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>Agree Moderately</i>	<i>Agree Strongly</i>
5%	10%	4%	36%	45%

Virtually all North Carolinians (95%) say they are more concerned about the environment than they used to be. When asked about their expectations for the future, an optimistic one-third expect the environment to improve but an equal number expect the environment will get worse

over the next five years. Nevertheless, a strong majority (70%) feel that impact on the environment is inevitable and are willing to live with some impact as long as things are kept in balance.

"Any kind of business or industry has some kind of impact on the environment. I am willing to live with some damage to the environment as long as we keep things in balance."

<i>Disagree Strongly</i>	<i>Disagree Moderately</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>Agree Moderately</i>	<i>Agree Strongly</i>
13%	13%	4%	42%	28%

Businesses are viewed as generally concerned by North Carolinians. In fact, over three-fourths of them (78%) agree that businesses in their community show concern for the environment and do their best to keep environmental damage to a minimum. This does not mean, however, that any kind of growth and development is accepted. For instance, while businesses such as recycling centers and electronics manufacturers receive high acceptance ratings (four-fifths favor their nearby siting), nuclear power plants and toxic waste sites are least popular, with less than 25 percent wanting them to locate in their community.

Although North Carolinians feel that businesses are concerned, only one in eight feel that businesses could do the most to solve environmental problems. Over half look to the government for solutions, with one-third pointing to state and local governments, and one-fifth to the federal government. Close to one-third believe that the solutions can best be attained by American consumers themselves.

"Which of the following groups would you say could do the most to help solve environmental problems?"

<i>State/Local Governments</i>	<i>American Consumers</i>	<i>Federal Government</i>	<i>American Businesses</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
32%	29%	21%	12%	6%

As time passes, the public will be called on to make a series of difficult choices based on the growing amounts of information that are available on these issues. The challenge to planners and decisionmakers in the years ahead will be to translate the public's desire for a balanced approach into workable plans of action for the benefit of all.

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